

EDUCATION IN THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL PROCESSES IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA, 2000-2008: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In the 1970's, Ivan Illich, Dore and others were already seriously criticizing the dominance of school education in the United States of America, by pointing to the consequent devaluing of other forms of learning. Formal learning was defined purely in terms of school attendance, and, its value, in terms of grades and certificates. The formal process of learning according to Torrado (1991) follows the banking principles according to which a learner took a new knowledge in exactly the same way that money is paid into an account. This article presents a report of a project embarked upon by a group of cocoa farmers at Owena, on small communities in Ondo State, Nigeria and being a sub-station in Ibadan, Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN), Ibadan on the outcome of educating participants in the formal and informal processes. The report shows that a higher percentage of the participants learned freely among themselves by raising and answering questions that were beneficial to their occupations, cocoa production, (major occupation), welfare, healthy living, among others. The significance of the project is to show that adults learn less under the formal education process, learn and become more active under the informal process. The informal learning process is further recommended so as to provide a framework for meaningful learning experiences, sustain learners, make learning stimulating and lifelong among the participants.

Keywords: Formal education, Informal education, Adult literacy, Voluntary, Comparison, Cocoa farm production

Introduction

Learning is the ability to display or demonstrate pieces of information or evidence that might provide solution to a problem. Learning is the acquisition of knowledge to solve

personal or community problems and the ability and capacity to diversify already acquired skills into meaningful ventures. The essence of learning is to become aware of what is happening in our environment and how best to adjust to the situation for self-survival.

Learning can be multi-dimensional, self-directed approach, distance learning approach, face-to-face, tutorials etc. All these are directed toward providing the required assistance to the learner to achieve a predetermined goal. This article shows informal learning experience of a group of farmers in Ondo State, Nigeria, and shows the outcomes of a desirable learning process complementing the formal learning approach.

Concept of formal learning

Formal learning is presumed to be exclusive. It takes place within a pedagogical hierarchy, at one level, the teacher, who passes on knowledge, and at another, the learner, who takes in knowledge. The formal system of education has essentially relied on the principles, structures and framework of British colonial education.

Over the years, the Nigerian education has become unrelated to life and living. Education in the project area largely resulted in the production and re-production of the dominant ideology of learning which had not been functioning. The ability to learn, critique, question and reflect upon one's own experience and the surrounding reality had been stunted through the formalized system of education process.

Concept of informal learning

Informal learning is frequently misused in the theoretical context to describe what will not fit elsewhere. Informal learning, generally starts from the way in which learning is organized. But the basic question often asked is: to what extent is informal and formal processes complementary? and to what extent can informal learning be coherent, meaningful and result-oriented?. Informal learning in daily life, is largely uncontrolled. Informal learning takes place in the prevailing social, family, communicative and productive contexts.

Under the informal learning process, achievement is only the key to success in all human activities. The pre-1842 years, when the formal education system was not introduced in Nigeria, the composite body of human knowledge seemed to double over the 20th century because what the grand- parents learned, informally applied for a lifetime rapid activity.

Participation in any informal education is capable of preparing and equipping learners for a variety and multiplicity of employments and roles due to its emphasis on discipline of self-directed learning and independent thinking. Studies have established a correlation between the quality and effectiveness of informal and formal processes of learning. Hamadache and Martin (1986) argue that informal learning may have played on the theory

of learning transforming into practices. Informal learning procedures bestow on the learners, the spirits of what one learns to transform into immediate utilization. This principle, aids the cultivation of the attitudes of tolerance, respect for differences, cultural diversity, learning to live together, heritage conservation, promotion of good life and the protection of life and properties.

Through the informal learning, learning is made to be exciting and refreshing and the outcome is social and economic integration. Informal education does not provide for one-short achievement through competitive examinations but make provision for lifelong learning continuum. In addition, informal learning is technology-driven whose delivery mode has always been guided by literacy skills and communication technologies.

Description of the subject area

Owena area is named after River Owena. The area is one of the remote areas in Ondo State. It lies between the Ondo State capital, Akure, and Ondo town whose name is used to name the state. Owena is one of the local government areas of Ondo State. It contains numerous villages whose people are basically cocoa and plantain farmers. Owena local government has a population of 16,780 people. The people are predominantly stark illiterates.

Life of the group before year 2000 project

Before the year 2000, the life of the farmers and people of Owena area in Ondo State, was to a danger point in poverty. Adult and childhood illiteracy, dependency, slash-and-burn farming were common. Environmental degradation, economic stagnation, women and childhood exploitation among the problems of living facing the people of the area. There was no irrigation set up even by CRIN or government that used the River Owena as subordinate to Benin River where “Benin-Owena River Basin” was coined into a general use in Nigeria. It is important to indicate that the sub-station of Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria of over four decades and the popular River Owena had no economic and social reflection on the economic and social activities of the people in the area.

Project

The project report was on a group of farmers at Owena, Ondo State of Nigeria – a rural sub-station of the Ibadan, Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN) on the outcome of educating participants in the formal and informal processes. The Project which started in the year 2000 was designed to find out whether or not the farmers could acquire and utilize the knowledge acquired to solve the occupational, socio-economic, vocational, domestic and all other associated problems for survival.

The project with two facilitators commenced in the year 2000 with the objectives of

providing an alternative to formal education which was no longer relevant to educate the teeming rural adult illiterates in Nigeria and Owena area in particular. The participants comprised of 29 cocoa farmers. Every one of them had their own cocoa plantations of different hectares of land. Inside the plantations there were stands of palm trees which yielded palm oil and other related products. Each of the farmers had apart from cocoa, some lands cultivated to produce yams, cocoyams, plantains, bananas and cassavas. In addition they grew vegetables for family consumption and even sell the surpluses.

The project started with 29 registered farmers who were randomly selected in the locality but based on distance from the learning center. By the end of the year 2008, the participants had increased to one sixty seven (167). In other words we had an additional one hundred and thirty-eight more participants who **voluntarily** registered to be part of the learning team between 2000 and 2008!!.

Out of the 29 initial participants, 4 of them had the primary school certificate. All the remaining 25 were stark illiterates. Those with the primary school education were not able to communicate effectively in the English language-the official language of Nigeria, but they could read, write and compute in Yoruba language being the language of the environment. The stark illiterates group (25) could only speak the Yoruba language fluently without the ability to read, and write in printed form.

Curriculum

The curriculum was designed by the author in collaboration with the Ondo State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education. The curriculum was designed in Yoruba language to enable the facilitators teach the participants in Yoruba language being the language of the environment. The four “literate” participants assisted in the teaching and learning process. The initial take-off was inspired by the provision of writing materials for the group to teach them basic literacy. The first one year was an intensive teaching modeled in the literacy education program based on the brochure from the Ondo State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal education. Having taught them the rudiment of reading and writing in Yoruba language, we started to meet informally to discuss other areas where the needs of the farmers were focused, ranging from planting, maintenance, harvesting and selling of cocoa to using the money wisely, health and healthy living, coming together to form cooperative farming, dry-season farming and so on.

Teaching method

The cocoa farmers were taught by using the explanation and demonstration techniques of teaching. Teaching essentially was informal. The four (4) literate ones among

the group assisted the project officers in teaching the rudiment of literacy. The teaching was not actually based on the competitive examination like that of the Ondo State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education which had an examination and choosing the best student or learners annually.

Under the project, instructors and learners came in contact one-on-one, and in most cases as a group to teach and learn and using personal and domestic illustrations and demonstrations. The procedure was always conducted in a free and flexible but conducive atmosphere. The voluntarism of participants to attend the learning centers was admonishingly impressive. Adequate records were however kept by the head of the facilitators. As the participants continued to increase, more adult education students at Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo were co-opted.

Three main methods were designed and used. The first method was called individual contact – this included farm visits, demonstrations and other individual contacts. The second method was group contact – this included all kinds of meetings such as short courses, general meetings, committees and others. The third method was called mass media – this included publication, newsletters, radio talks, radio recorded programs, exhibition, television, film, pamphlets, posters etc. The method used supplemented and complemented each other at different period of the project and according to the financial strength of the facilitators in each occasion.

Problems

There were various problems in the course of the project. Some of the problems were grouped into physical, institutional and human resources. Under the physical problem, there were poor and unmotorable roads, especially during the rainy seasons. Under the institutional, there was the lack of operational policy and lack of security. The human resources aspect was the apparent illiteracy of the rural masses, coupled with lack of dynamic local leadership. Efforts were consolidated to face and resolve many of the problems.

Analysis

Within eight years the project had recorded an impressive encouragement of the villages around Owena. Such that at meetings on weekends, the participants came to the meeting centers to share experiences. There was an increase of 82.63%. The coverage after the third year was divided into three zones so that the participants did not find it difficult to meet with the facilitators.

Closer contacts between the farmers and the facilitators was effected and as the production of cocoa products, cassava, fishery, banana and plantain effective in the area

increased tremendously.

The impact of the project was significantly felt when the comparison was made between the conventional (formal) teaching of literacy education in the informal system of educating the participants. Participants were encouraged to register for the project and a higher impressive percentage increase was recorded. A yearly increase of about 52.87% was recorded.

At the same time between 2000 and 2008 according to Ondo State Agency for Literacy and Non-Formal Education Annual Reports, the total enrollment of adult literacy education in Owena local government area, was 3051 of which 2380 (78.0%) of the total enrollment had withdrawn and never acquire basic literacy or any other form of education for development.

The farmer preferred to get information from the project facilitator and among themselves, and rely on such information than the ones provided by government agencies in their area. The farmers regarded the facilitators and contact-farmers as priority carriers of information in the area of cocoa cultivation and food technology.

The participants exposed themselves to information which would enrich their knowledge in farming activities. The project established the fact that the more information made available to the farmers, the higher the efficiency of production. The information provided on the availability of credit, the higher was the adoption of new technologies for higher percentage yield.

The participants perceived the facilitators as contact farmers, gatekeepers, opinion leaders, and liaison people in the local environment. Agriculture Trade Fairs were mounted (thrice) for them as these provided good sources of information under the informal system of teaching and learning.

The project served as the most important link and communication in the chain of developments because of the functions it performed. The fundamental focus was to improve the efficiency of the farmers by improving the knowledge of persuasion, to apply improved methods of living and general welfare and to leave a better world devoid of mysteries and obnoxious traditions.

As a result of the project, farmers in the area were integrated into about two areas of functions – (a) getting farmers into a frame of mind and attitude conducive to the acceptance of agro-technological change. (b) assisting the farmers to gain the knowledge to operate in a commercial economy by providing guidance to them in decision-making process.

Comparison

Freire (1977) is of the view that the use of informal system of training as could be seen in the project, has a lasting impact on the participants. One of such impacts was the sustenance of the learners and another one was the urge to learn more. From the project, and the system of the informality of the procedure for teaching, there were noticeable basic reforms in the behavior of the participants in nature and to themselves. The hitherto poor farmers had realized their existence and no longer allow the few elites from the cities and urban centers especially of the Ondo State capital (Akure) and Ondo township to determine and manage their resources for them. The poor had been empowered through the project to control their resources — land, forest, cocoa and other farm products, and other finances required were harnessed to their benefits.

The past decades under the formal education system, development have shown exactly the opposite of what it intended for education and teaching to achieve. Instead of poverty alleviation as one of the outcomes of literacy, what was seen, was more poverty. People enrolled in the learning centers but were not sustained to learn and acquire the necessary skills to enable them cope with life.

Essentially, the curriculum provided for literacy programs in the country does not allow an informal measure of learning to take care or guarantee basic reforms of livelihood among the categories of learners. But under the informal learning process, people were empowered to decide their own destiny and to share hopes for a better world without imposition. Thus, the participants were able to build a more equitable future which implies the right and ability to organize and unite the forces of the communities, ethical backgrounds of the peoples and regain the sense of history and give the history of the nation and the area a new beginning!

This informal system of learning facilitated a political latitude which all Nigerians need to guarantee for a more just, decent and human future for their children and grandchildren and in turn the survival and development of their cultures and thus contribute to the construction and re-construction of a true Nigeria according to Jayeola-Omoyeni (1998). This informal learning strategy facilitated and guaranteed to a high esteem an agenda for social reform, adjustment, new life expectancy, agricultural business and other economic transformation into indissoluble development.

Withdrawal of participants is one of the most serious problems facing the promotion of adult literacy education in Nigeria now. The project ensured that participants were always present, hear and involve in the decision-making policy that affected them educationally and

occupationally. It created a content of better learning opportunities for the learners - a range of context which is flexible enough to shape the learner's needs and hopes. The project also helped the participants to learn how to share experiences with each other and recognize the value of grassroots materials and activities. The project promoted the value of formal and informal learning and enabled the participants to master literacy well enough to be used in creating a friendly environment, supporting and developing better livelihood.

It is noted that the informal and formal systems are both processes and procedures to acquire knowledge through intensive manipulation of each of the systems in the field of teaching-learning procedures using the informal system, facilitated the sustenance of learners to learn.

Suggestion for action

It is observed that the informal process of educating the adults is more valuable and result-oriented than the formal system used by the Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education Commission. It is recommended that (a) informal system of education should as a policy be used to teach and educate the illiterate adults in their areas; (b) the State Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education in Nigeria should utilize this approach to enable more participants (learners) to stay and learn not only the rudiments of literacy but to be more functional in their various social and economic day-to-day activities.

Conclusion

As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) noted, the literate environment is not just the simple collection of writing factories in national languages, but a process of continuing transition from oral (informal) traditions to actual practices which could only be developed by means of regular practice of written communication and everyday life. It is however, important to state that the project being reported here is an eye-opener to undo the damage that the over-emphasis on formal schooling or formal education has wrought on education in Nigerian national history. The damage is obvious according to Obanya (2007) in its camp-structures – primary, secondary and tertiary – with their fixed curricula and competitive examinations. In addition, the project has brought and support the idea that stark illiterate can learn well if they are not “forced” to do so through a rigid literacy curriculum.

Since the 21st century is the age of **Education For All (EFA)** effort should be made to imbibe the spirit behind this project and project it to a national focus for use. Illiteracy must be wiped off in Nigeria. The formal system of learning has unfortunately not been helpful in this regard. It is time, and **now** is the time to use the informal means to complement the formal learning process to promote adult literacy education. The persistence of high rate

of adult illiteracy is one of the most significant indicators of political, socioeconomic and cultural inequalities that are limiting the essential values of human dignity in Nigeria and other countries with a high rate of adult illiteracy.

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